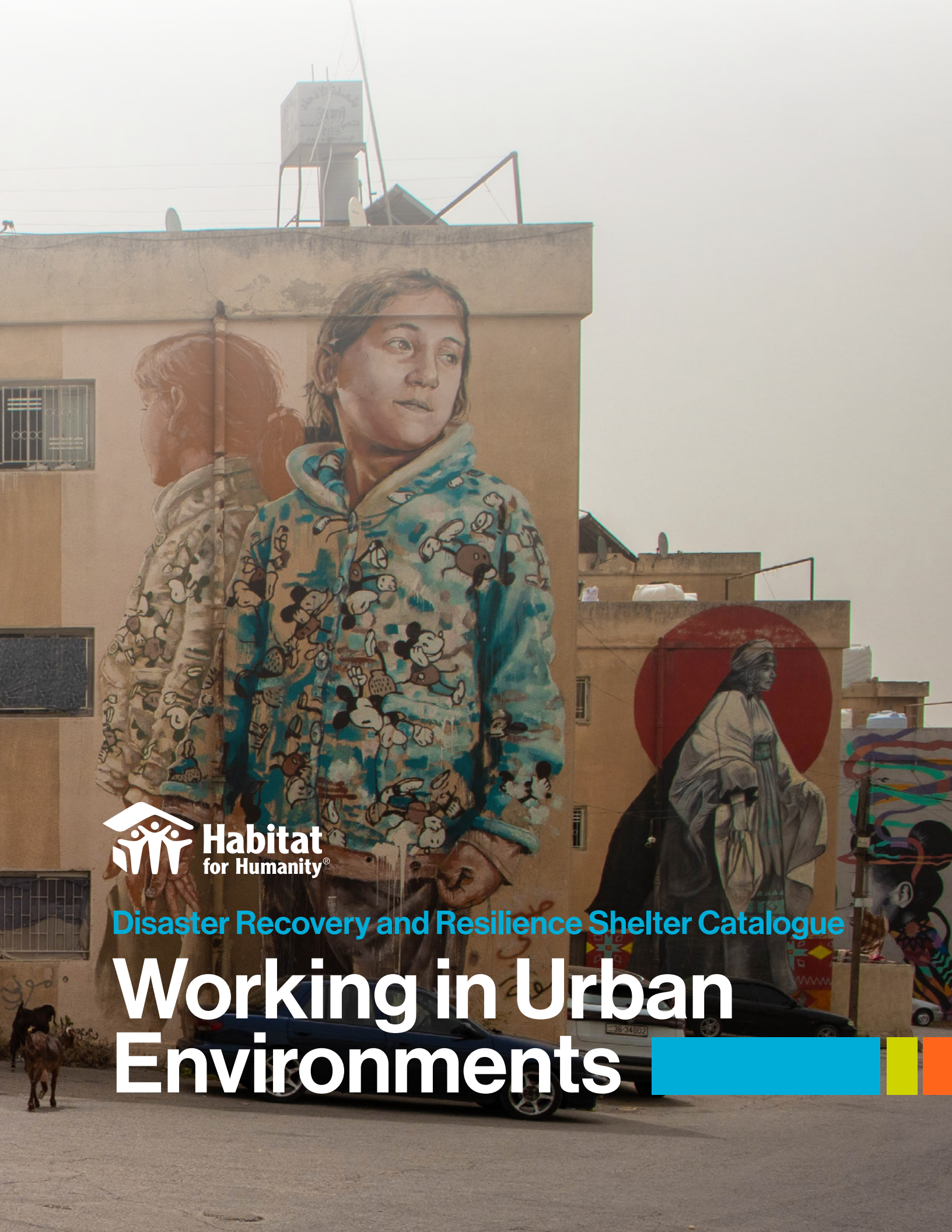

Habitat for Humanity®

Disaster Recovery and Resilience Shelter Catalogue

Working in Urban Environments

Thank you

We are thankful to those within the Habitat for Humanity network and community who contributed content and submissions for this publication: Jaime Mok, Javier Cidón, Mario Flores, Lubna Al Attiah, Mohammed I. Salem, Rabab Fakhredine, Katarzyna Jasik-Cainzos, Ana Olaru, Katharina Jazbec, Katarzyna Przybylska, Molnár Zsóka.

We are grateful to the following donors whose financial support made the work described within this publication possible: Aktion Deutschland Hilft, or ADH; Away Travel; Biedronka Foundation; Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland; City of Warsaw; Comic Relief (via Cities Alliance); Council of Europe Development Bank; Giro555; The Heineken Company; Henkel GmbH & Co.KG via Fritz Henkel Stiftung; International Organization for Migration or IOM; IKEA Retail Poland; JTIF; OPEC Fund for International Development, or OFID; private and anonymous donors; Rolls-Royce; ShelterBox International; Swiss Krono Group; Swiss Rapid Response Fund; United Methodist Committee on Relief, or UMCOR; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR; and USAID-OFDA (now USAID/BHA).

A grateful recognition to Habitat's national organizations, affiliates and partners, particularly their field staff, who have always showed extreme dedication and commitment to work in challenging post-disaster environments, making all the work described here possible. Our gratitude is also to the donors who facilitated these interventions. Finally, our thoughts also go out to those families and communities who participated in these projects.

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In memory of **Andreas Hapsoro (Haps)**.

Foreword

In August 1992, hundreds of homes were obliterated by Hurricane Andrew in south Florida, USA. Significantly, 27 homes built by Habitat for Humanity in Dade County weathered the storm with window damage and water intrusion but no structural damage. This was the first encounter between Habitat for Humanity and a major disaster event. In 1998, Habitat started responding to disasters, beginning with hurricanes Mitch and Georges in Central America and the Caribbean. Since then, Habitat has responded to more than a hundred disaster events and has implemented dozens of resilience building projects in varied contexts around the world.

Habitat focuses its responses along the shelter continuum, providing a path for disaster-affected people and communities to envision an incremental process of reconstructing both homes and lives. We call this holistic approach "Pathways to Permanence."

Over the past several decades, Habitat has helped thousands of disaster-impacted families transform feelings of grief, despair and loss into active participation and agency of their own recovery through the distribution of shelter materials and tools; training; facilitation of transitional accommodations; home repairs; the construction of new, resilient homes; and the provision of technical assistance.

Habitat has continued to adapt to the changing needs of survivors. Recognizing that responding to disasters is not enough, Habitat also has implemented initiatives to build the resilience and preparedness of communities before a disaster strikes. Every home built by Habitat strives to follow best practices and code compliance to mitigate the impact of natural hazards and includes adaptations to the changing climate and environmental conditions. The same applies to home improvement projects in existing communities and settlements. Issues around land tenure and property are also addressed, as these constitute key components of a resilient housing solution.

Introduction

Published in 2013, the first edition of the Habitat for Humanity Disaster Response Shelter Catalogue collected more than 60 case studies describing a breadth of Habitat disaster response projects around the world. To account for disaster risk reduction and response projects implemented since 2013, we have designed a series of five thematic editions. This is the first of the series, dedicated to Habitat's disaster risk reduction and response work in urban environments.

By 2030, almost 5 billion people — 60% of the world's population — will live in urban areas, and nearly three-quarters of the urban population will live in cities in low- and middle-income countries.

Working in urban areas requires detailed attention to the elements of the urban context, such as the complexity of the built environment — a combination of dwellings and infrastructure, the population density, migration trends, markets systems, and the governance issues that revolve around multiple constituencies in cities. Rapid, unplanned expansion and the increase of the urban low-income population in informal settlements create structural vulnerabilities and disaster risk due to highly dense, poor-quality construction, which often occurs on marginal land in high-exposure areas that have limited access to service infrastructure. These elements exacerbate the impact of shocks and can trigger cascading crises due to overlapping and compounding risks and vulnerabilities.

The complexities of these expanding urban areas, coupled with a projected increase in the frequency and severity of global disasters and emergencies occurring in towns and cities, substantiate the need for projects that build resilience, interventions that reduce risks, and risk-informed responses to disaster events.

Lessons learned

There are common threads that we can derive from Habitat's disaster risk reduction and response work in urban areas. From the case studies presented in this edition, we would like to highlight the following:

- **Better analysis is needed to fully understand the dynamics of response work in urban settings.** This is particularly true when implementing projects in existing informal settlements with underlying community priorities that need to be reconciled with project interventions. Time is needed to achieve consensus around programmatic options, and we have learned that top-down proposed solutions will not work or will not be embraced by communities.

- **Working in urban settings requires a multisectoral approach that goes well beyond just the four walls and roof of a house.** Urban communities are a complex, dynamic environment that involve — and require — basic services, community infrastructure, roads, waste management, governance issues, livelihood opportunities, inclusive environments, educational and health facilities, and a sense of safety and security. Understanding these elements will better inform the design of our projects and programs and the way our work seeks to find meaningful and holistic links between housing and these components.

- **We need to further refine some of the applied methodologies to develop community awareness and action plans so that their intention is better understood.** Concretely, the Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness, or PASSA, methodology has a community action plan, or CAP, as a primary deliverable. The CAP is a tool that allows for the identification of quick-impact interventions and can serve as the basis for concept notes and fundraising action. In some instances, however, the PASSA process is used as an awareness approach, with the importance of the CAP left to second place.

- **Secure land tenure has a significant impact in urban settings.** People live in informal settlements because their location represents livelihood opportunities that compensate irregularities and insecurity around land tenure. This is a very sensitive issue, and through our work we have found that there is a direct correlation between achieving secure land tenure and resilience in the broader sense, as this takes away the threat of evictions and harm to families. We believe that performing due diligence around land tenure issues should be part of every project or program intervention in urban areas in order to properly address housing, land and property components with a protection lens.

The case studies presented in this edition describe how Habitat went about implementing innovative and nontraditional approaches to complex problems in urban environments. We hope that the successes and lessons learned through these projects will inform new project interventions, as we face these challenges in the future in our pursuit of a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

MARIO C. FLORES
Director, Field Operations
Disaster Risk Reduction and Response
Habitat for Humanity International

Reflection

Home life now feels more normal for a Ukrainian refugee family living in a rental unit in Warsaw, Poland.

Community participation is a key process in defining programmatic interventions in the Naggo Head community of Portmore, Jamaica.

A multistory building's facade is repaired after damage caused by the Beirut Port explosion in Lebanon.

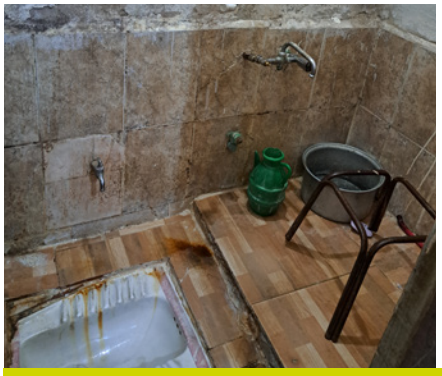
Rehabilitating urban communal spaces was an important intervention for facilitating community interaction in Beirut.

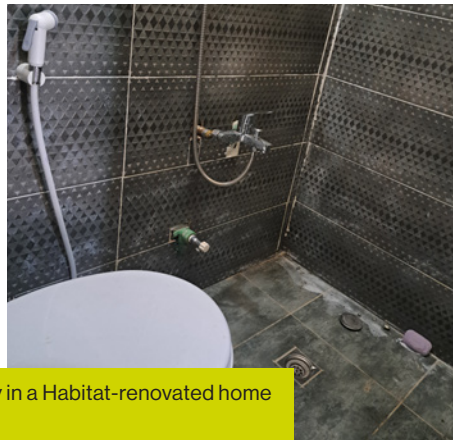
Before-and-after pictures of a renovated dwelling in south Amman, Jordan.

Furniture and non-food items, or NFIs, were provided to accommodate dwelling units for Ukrainian refugees in Warsaw, Poland.

The West Point slum community in Monrovia, Liberia.

Harsh environmental conditions prevail in most informal urban settlements, such as West Point .





Before-and-after pictures of a sanitation facility in a Habitat-renovated home in south Amman, Jordan.

Habitat's work in urban environments includes the production of technical assistance guidance to increase the resilience of homes.

NFIs were distributed as part of the assistance to flood-affected families in Asuncion, Paraguay.

Children play in a poor, spontaneously settled urban community in Asuncion.

Countries where Habitat works

Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Bolivia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Brazil
Bulgaria
Cambodia
Canada
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Dominican Republic
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Fiji
Germany
Ghana
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Hong Kong, SAR China
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Ireland
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Lebanon
Lesotho
Malawi
Malaysia
Mexico
Myanmar
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Northern Ireland
North Macedonia
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Romania
Samoa
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
South Africa
South Korea
Sri Lanka
Syria
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad and Türkiye
Uganda
Ukraine
United Kingdom
United States of America
Vanuatu
Vietnam
Zambia

Habitat locations featured in the catalogue series

Habitat national offices

1. Habitat Bangladesh
2. Habitat Dominican Republic
3. Habitat Fiji
4. Habitat Germany
5. Habitat Guatemala
6. Habitat Haiti
7. Habitat Honduras
8. Habitat Hungary
9. Habitat India
10. Habitat Indonesia
11. Habitat Jamaica (Closed)
12. Habitat Jordan
13. Habitat Malawi
14. Habitat Mexico
15. Habitat Nepal
16. Habitat Nicaragua
17. Habitat Paraguay
18. Habitat Peru
19. Habitat Philippines
20. Habitat Poland
21. Habitat Romania
22. Habitat Vietnam

Habitat for Humanity International area offices

1. Africa
2. Asia and the Pacific
3. Europe and Middle East
4. Latin America and the Caribbean

Intervention types

Each case study in this report details intervention types that fall into the following broad categories, denoted by the icons in the table below.

Icon	Intervention category
	Non-Food Items (NFIs) Distribution
	Temporary Shelter Support
	Technical Assistance
	Construction
	Basic Services and Community Infrastructure
	Capacity Building
	Market-Based Interventions
	Influence
	Livelihoods

Habitat for Humanity®

Beirut Port Explosion • 2020

Burj Hammoud • Beirut, Lebanon

Types of intervention

Construction: Housing rehabilitation

Livelihoods

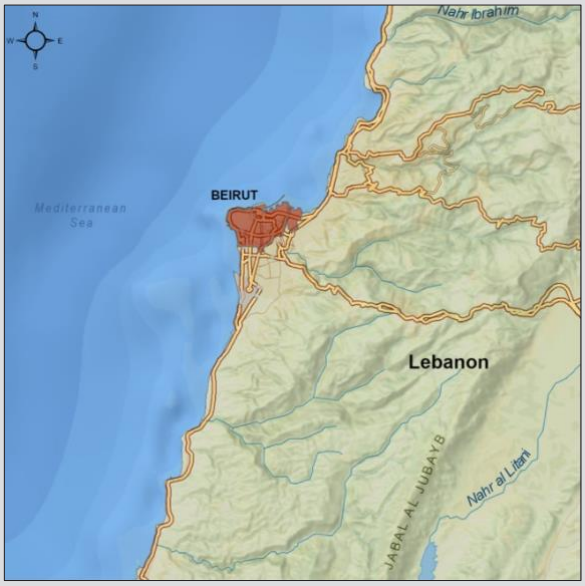
Community infrastructure

Project targets

- **206 households** (710 individuals) through shelter repairs.
- **283 households and businesses** (1,190 individuals, directly and indirectly) through urban recovery.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity International and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).
- **Partners:** Local implementing entities included The Social Association, Awareness & Consolidation Association, Islamic Social Welfare Association, Cenacle de la Lumiere.



Timeline

August 2020: Explosion in the Port of Beirut.

September–October 2020: Identified CRS as strategic partner; four local implementing partners selected and trained.

November 2020: Zones 78 and 79 assigned for minor and moderate repair and rehabilitation.

February 2021: Identification of urban recovery interventions.

May-June 2021: Habitat assessments are conducted, and a new area is selected.

November 2021: Completion of after-action review.

Summary

Lebanon, already grappling with economic collapse and social unrest, was dealt a devastating blow by the Beirut port explosion in August 2020.

The repair and recovery project was implemented through external partners, CRS and local counterparts, with technical support from Habitat for Humanity International. Its main goal was to assist vulnerable families whose homes had been damaged by the blast, helping them rebuild and achieve basic habitability standards. It also helped formalize housing tenure for renters. In addition to individual dwellings, the project focused on improving the wider community's access to essential services.

Background

On Aug. 4, 2020, a devastating explosion ripped through Beirut's port. Lebanon, already grappling with heightened social tensions, unemployment, crippled public services and inflation due to an unprecedented financial crisis and COVID-19 lockdowns, was dealt a further blow.

The blast, fueled by 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, devastated the shoreline, displacing 300,000 and leaving 40,000 homes beyond repair. Windows shattered across 150,000 apartments, and property damage exceeded USD 10 billion.

With Beirut — and Lebanon as a whole — already suffering from a 95% local currency devaluation, importing additional resources and rebuilding essentials became even more challenging because of surging costs. This tragedy deepened the nation's collective trauma and strained its limited resources.

Despite lacking an operational presence in the country, Habitat for Humanity partnered with CRS, a well-established international NGO delivering aid through its network of local partners.

Project programming

The Beirut port explosion left homes, businesses and public spaces devastated. This project responded by repairing damaged homes, shops and communal infrastructure, prioritizing repairs based on severity and pre-existing vulnerabilities. Local partners gained valuable skills through mentoring and capacity building. The intervention also provided technical support on housing, land and property, or HLP, to other organizations.

To restore minimum habitability conditions, the project repaired windows, doors, roofs and electrical systems. It improved kitchens and bathrooms, addressed dampness and mold, and installed handrails for safety. This lightened the financial burden on residents, with repairs costing between USD 1,500 and USD 4,500.

The project also sought to empower the community. Livelihood initiatives fostered self-reliance, while the urban recovery intervention in the Maraash zone focused on well-being and social cohesion. Upgraded open spaces, organized cables, streetlights and revitalized building facades aimed to create a more vibrant and connected neighborhood.

Implementation

- Project teams employed **participatory methodologies** at multiple scales, which allowed communities to be meaningfully engaged in decision-making on activity design, including shelter repairs and identifying community micro-projects.
- Given the context and the similarity in household socioeconomic vulnerability within the area, **eligibility** was based on blast damage, assessed through door-to-door mapping.
- **Output targets and unit costs for light and moderate repairs** were based on sector estimates of approximately USD 1,500 for light repairs and USD 4,500 for moderate repairs. The targets were adjusted based on actual needs according to the assessment results.
- In exchange for repairs, **tripartite rental agreements** were signed among the implementing entity, beneficiary tenants and landlords, stipulating a rent freeze for 12 months and no eviction of tenant households.
- A **contractor-led approach** was taken to avoid construction price fluctuations throughout the project's life span and to reduce monitoring visits to households during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- **Project teams conducted regular visits** to ensure the repairs were done based on the agreed bill of quantity and with the desired quality. Once repairs were complete, the project team signed a handover document with the beneficiary and conducted a survey measuring the satisfaction level regarding repair quality, safety measures, COVID-19 measures, and behavior of workers and staff.
- The project developed an **HLP guidance** note in the context of the Beirut blast and disseminated it to the shelter sector actors. Information on tenants, housing and land rights was also developed and disseminated in targeted communities.

- After completing work in designated zones, the implementing entities moved to a **newly identified Maraash zone**. They switched to an area-based approach because of the multisectoral needs identified (such as food, health and welfare) and the population's high level of vulnerability.
- The design for the **open space** was discussed with the community and coordinated with the municipality. It included sustainability, durability, safety and inclusivity for people of different age groups, genders and abilities. The space featured LED lighting, native plants, heavy-duty furniture, rainwater harvesting, toilets for people with disabilities, a children's play space, murals, shaded areas, and a steel fence for safety.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- Many actors conducted assessments and left the affected area without following through with the communities or enacting interventions. **Focusing on a geographically bound area** allowed the implementing agencies to build trust with community members and enabled successful implementation and recovery efforts.
- **A holistic, integrated approach** should be used when supporting crisis-affected communities from the outset of the intervention to meet household- and community-level needs in target areas through infrastructure and shelter repairs within the same geographically bound zone.
- Many of the successes of this project can be attributed to actions taken in the planning and design phase as the project team anticipated challenges and took steps to mitigate them. Through **careful planning**, the local partners were able to implement project activities and complete the repairs with a minimum number of home visits.
- **Clear lines of communication and a unified vision and tools** (planning, tracking, scoring and monitoring tools) allow for quality and timely implementation and the exchange of experiences and learning.
- **Agility in implementation and adaptability of the team is key to delivering an effective response.** The implementing partners' ability to make quick amendments to the bills of quantity, provide complementing referral services for excluded households or those in need of additional humanitarian assistance, and be a continued presence on the ground to ensure proper coordination with the local authorities and different actors proved to be essential for a timely and quality response.
- Before any learning materials are developed, **dissemination channels should be predetermined** to ensure optimal sharing.

Habitat for Humanity®

BRACED • 2014

Portmore, Jamaica

Types of intervention

Technical assistance: Land tenure

Construction: Disaster-resilient retrofitting

Capacity building: Emergency preparedness training and awareness

Project targets

- **6,386 individuals** through shelter and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene).
- **1,000 households** through land tenure.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Jamaica Habitat for Humanity, Habitat's Latin America and Caribbean Area Office.
- **Partners:** SUYO, ADRA, Portmore Municipality, University of the West Indies (UWI).

Timeline

September 2014:
Phase I: Registration of new entity in the country.

October 2014–June 2015:
Selection of target neighborhoods and geo-referenced assessments.

June 2015–May 2018:
Construction training program: Housing retrofitting pilots and awareness on safe shelter and WASH.

September 2016:
Phase II: Incorporation of land tenure and urban redevelopment components in target neighborhoods.

March 2018:
Phase III: Development of a nationwide fast-track mechanism for land tenure regularization.

June 2019:
End of project.

Summary

Building Resilience and Capacities for Emerging Disasters, or BRACED, an innovative four-year disaster risk reduction project in Jamaica, focused on vulnerable informal settlements, integrating physical improvements and legal support with community-driven initiatives to enhance resilience against floods, hurricanes and earthquakes. The program used a neighborhood-based approach, involving community mapping to identify vulnerabilities in housing, water, sanitation and urban planning, alongside capacity-building programs. Secure land tenure was emphasized as crucial for long-term resilience. Designed as a pilot, the project aimed to create a replicable model for slum communities throughout Jamaica and the Caribbean.

Background

Portmore, the second largest city in Jamaica, faces significant natural hazards, such as flooding, storm surges, hurricanes and earthquakes. The city is particularly vulnerable because of uncontrolled urban expansion, leading to informal settlements with low-quality housing, inadequate access to water and sanitation, and weak community structures. Most densely populated areas are located on low-lying reclaimed lands, exacerbating the risk. Additionally, Portmore's precarious urban settlements suffer from poorly maintained infrastructure, difficult-to-navigate streets, and a dysfunctional solid waste management system. These physical challenges are further compounded by low levels of education, high unemployment, socioeconomic exclusion, poverty and violence.

Although a national Habitat-branded organization had existed in the past, Habitat for Humanity International's Latin America and Caribbean area office had to register a new instrumental entity in the country to operate (Habitat for Humanity Jamaica).

Project programming

The project aimed to pioneer effective shelter and settlements and water, sanitation and hygiene, or WASH, interventions to reduce disaster risks in informal urban settlements and to foster inclusive policies for vulnerable communities across the Caribbean region.

Program Phase 1

The outputs and activities of the initial proposal were:

- Community mapping through different participatory and digital methods to analyze vulnerabilities to disasters and capacities for responding to them, and to identify existing and missing urban basic services.
- Promoting housing resilience by training residents in construction trades and subsequent recruitment, retrofitting demonstration housing, creating a resilient housing manual adapted to the context, raising awareness of safe housing and promoting self-retrofitting.
- Implementing micro-projects that enhance community resilience, to be decided on by the communities.
- Improving access to basic WASH services, including raising WASH awareness; improving access to safe water; building demonstrative, disaster-resilient sanitation solutions; and setting up a garbage collection system.
- Bolstering community preparedness for emergencies through increased awareness, courses, and the development of community response plans.
- Implementing micro-projects that enhance community resilience, to be decided on by the communities.

Program Phase 2

The intervention uncovered a critical need to address settlement rehabilitation and land tenure security as key factors exacerbating disaster vulnerability, as insecure tenure discourages homeowners from investing in their properties. Recognizing the promising potential of this intervention, the donor extended their support with an additional funding tranche, centered on comprehensive community redevelopment plans and embedding secure tenure into target communities.

Program Phase 3

Acknowledging the impact of this transformative initiative, the donor offered a third tranche aimed at expanding the scope and impact by establishing an efficient "fast-track" methodology to accelerate national land tenure regulation initiatives.

Implementation

- The project had a **steering committee** made up of senior Habitat Latin America and Caribbean staff members, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Response Caribbean manager, and the project manager in Jamaica.
- The project began with **comprehensive assessments of target settlements**, using enumeration methodology, which included surveys and geo-referenced mapping. The **participatory approach to safe shelter awareness**,[1] or PASSA, community methodology was also implemented. Interestingly, it identified the lack of land tenure security as a critical obstacle to enhancing resilience.
- The initial **housing retrofitting** was unsuccessful because of a lack of technical information suited to local construction practices in informal neighborhoods. In response, Habitat developed a technical manual and training program, drawing from international literature but tailored to the local context, which enabled successful rehabilitation efforts.
- Although initially working with a national NGO **for water, sanitation and hygiene** activities, Habitat took over full implementation after facing constraints. In the absence of national expertise, an international firm was contracted to train local staff members and provide technical assistance.
- Communities selected **micro-projects for resilience**, including warning signs, shelter upgrades and drainage improvements. A renovated community center addressed additional needs.
- Habitat's **neighbourhood approach** engaged the local government, communities and the nearby private sector through regular meetings and participatory activities managed from community resource centres.
- The project grew in scope over the years as more donor funding became available.
- The donor's first grant and time extension enabled the completion of pending activities. Initial plans to outsource **land tenure activities** to a local university were discarded because of excessive costs, and Habitat developed internal capacity instead. The **university** continued its active involvement in **settlement redevelopment** aspects and became really engaged on this.
- Encouraged by the success of land tenure security in improving resilience, the donor provided **another grant extension** to refine the "fast track" methodology at the community level and collaborate with the government for national policy development. The land tenure expert from Habitat Latin America and the Caribbean led this phase and worked closely with the local team and with consultants who remotely created a digital GIS information platform.
- The **advocacy** strategy involved working with government agencies, NGOs, universities and community representatives through an advisory committee. By holding workshops and forums to educate both community members and government officials, guidelines, rehabilitation plans and a fast-track methodology were created to support long-term change.

Challenges

- Obtaining government registration to operate took six months, delaying the start-up of the intervention. It was resolved by requesting a non-cost extension from the donor.
- There were some difficulties when entering the communities for the first time, because promises made to the communities by other nonprofit organizations in the past had not been fulfilled. We partnered with a local entity to facilitate this process.
- Implementing a project with a holistic approach requires the provision of technical capacity in a wide range of disciplines. Identifying so many local experts in a timely manner was a challenge.
- Jamaica's sociocultural context is diverse and presents certain challenges to the adoption of foreign experiences, even within our local project team. To address these issues, a Caribbean national was appointed to represent the project. Local team members were encouraged to visit similar projects abroad to promote the exchange of knowledge and perspectives. Openness to new ideas and international experience were valued as key criteria in the selection of new local staff members.

[1] *Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA) Manual,* IFRC, 2020. https://www.ifrc.org/document/participatory-approach-safe-shelter-awareness-passa-manual

- The lack of technical documentation on the reinforcement of houses according to the local construction systems was solved by the development of a manual on this subject, developed by specialists, tested on the project repairs and discussed with the community builders.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- **Community members were trained and empowered**, and now have extended roles as community advocates.
- The **hurricane-resistant building guide**, adapted to local Caribbean wooden building cultures, achieved unexpectedly wide distribution. Several websites have reproduced the digital version, further increasing its reach and distribution. In addition, the guide has been translated and adapted for other areas in the region, including the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.
- At the community level, the **formalization of community land improves access to infrastructure investments**, as the government is now able to provide public services formerly denied to informal settlements, such as water piping, electricity and drainage.
- The project developed a **fast-track, low-cost procedure for land regularization** in Jamaica's informal urban settlements. This had a major impact on these communities, enabling them to better prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. These efforts directly impacted over 6,000 people, and 65,000 more people were expected to benefit indirectly.
- The **local staff members** who participated in the project gained significant expertise, and many of them maintained their involvement with the project communities or continued their careers in the development sector with other organizations. For instance, the Habitat Jamaica land tenure specialists established a social enterprise that offered community services and government consulting. And UWI, five years after the closure, continues to work on the urban development plan for informal neighborhoods in Portmore.
- **Implementing projects directly in countries with no previous presence** is very challenging, in terms of time to get the organization registered, knowledge of the context and networks, local recognition, etc. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the intervention after the organization's exit from the country is also a challenge.
- The **PASSA** process provides information for housing risk assessments, and the community action plans developed by the participants should inform the rest of the project activities; it is quite common to misunderstand this methodology as a mere awareness-raising activity.
- The **hypothesis that land tenure security is a critical factor in enhancing the resilience** of human settlements is highly plausible based on the success of this project, yet it remains to be conclusively proved through rigorous research and evidence.

Habitat for Humanity®

Liberia Country Program • 2016

Monrovia metropolitan area (Greater Monrovia), Liberia

Types of intervention

Technical assistance: Disaster risk assessment

Capacity building: PASSA — Participatory approach to safe shelter awareness

Project targets

- Local authorities of Greater Monrovia (cities and townships), National Housing Authority, Ministry of Public Works, Liberia Water and Sewerage Corporation, and more than 30,000 people served in the Peace Island informal settlement community.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity International.
- **Partners:** Government of Liberia, Monrovia City Corporation, Paynesville City Corporation, YMCA, Slumdwellers International (SDI), United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLGA), UN-HABITAT, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), and Cenacle de la Lumiere.

Timeline

July 2016: Project begins.

September 2016: Slum Upgrading and Affordable Housing Policy Framework completed.

November 2016: Hazards and vulnerability assessment implemented.

January 2019: PASSA training of trainers conducted.

April–May 2019: PASSA process conducted in Peace Island slum community.

January 2020–October 2021: Implementation of CAP projects in Peace Island.

Summary

The Liberia country program was a larger multisectoral program that involved interventions at the community, city and national levels related to policy inception and changes, housing market analysis and inadequate urbanization drivers that impact the housing ecosystem in Liberia — and in Greater Monrovia in particular.

The disaster risk reduction component included implementing a hazards and vulnerability assessment in several slum settlements; a "training of trainers" in the participatory approach for safe shelter awareness,[1] or PASSA; and the rollout of this participatory methodology in the Peace Island informal settlement, which led to the development of a community action plan, or CAP. The projects identified in the CAP, mostly related to drinking water, latrine construction and solid waste management, were subsequently successfully implemented.

[1] *Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA) Manual,* IFRC, 2020. https://www.ifrc.org/document/participatory-approach-safe-shelter-awareness-passa-manual

Background

Liberia is one of the poorest countries in the world, with approximately 85% of the population subsisting below the international poverty line. It is also one of the most urbanized countries in the region; almost 30% of Liberia's entire population resides in Montserrado County, of which approximately 70% reside in Monrovia, the capital city. Disasters and a series of civil wars that ended in 2003 have left a legacy of underdevelopment exacerbated by meager income levels, a weak financial sector and low institutional capacity. Changing demographics, unplanned urbanization and climate change have augmented existing vulnerabilities to future disasters that will threaten Liberia's population and sustainable development goals.

Most Liberians lack decent and affordable housing and live in substandard housing conditions. It is estimated that 70% of the population of greater Monrovia live in informal settlements, with poor access to adequate housing and basic services.

There is a huge need for affordable and adequate housing in Greater Monrovia, where people build their own dwellings and rely heavily on the informal market.

Project programming

Habitat's Liberia Country Program brought together government, private and community actors to develop a policy framework for improving slums and creating affordable housing. This framework guides the design and construction of different housing and improvement models in the Greater Monrovia Metropolitan Area (Monrovia, Paynesville, West Point and other municipalities). The purpose of the policy framework was to identify all the key components and drivers for affordable housing strategies that facilitate better access to finance for the urban poor and more inclusive markets to support the housing value chain, as well as innovative, sustainable and scalable slum upgrading approaches that take into consideration existing vulnerabilities, hazards and complexities on the ground, including social and environmental conditions, poor quality of existing housing stock, access to quality materials, access to basic services, low affordability levels, lack of institutional and financial sector capacity, and land tenure issues. The hazards and vulnerability assessment consisted of a macro-level assessment and community-level assessment.

Implementation

The disaster risk reduction component implemented within the Liberia country pogram consisted of a hazards and vulnerability assessment and the inception of PASSA.

The objective of the assessment was to identify critical hazards and vulnerabilities affecting greater Monrovia, identify critical actions, and analyze the impact and consequences of proposed actions in consultation with key stakeholders. Both the macro-level and community-level assessments were accomplished by gathering information directly from local stakeholders and communities and from reviewing relevant secondary data, including data collected from surveys, existing GIS/satellite data, key informant interviews, transect walks and projections of the foreseen impacts of climate change.

Within Greater Monrovia, the assessment identified areas that will eventually be affected by climate change, prioritizing the West Point informal settlement. This area, which some 70,000 people call home, is expected to disappear in the next 30 years as a result of rising sea levels.

The PASSA component consisted of a "training of trainers" implemented jointly by the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, or IFRC, and Habitat. A group of those certified in the training moved on to implement a PASSA process in the informal settlement of Peace Island. The outcome was a CAP that identified water, sanitation and the management of solid waste as priority areas of community-level intervention. With funding from the OPEC Fund for International Development, or OFID, the following project outputs were achieved:

- **Increased access to potable water** for 30,000 people through two high-yielding boreholes, a solar pump system, an elevated water reservoir with six secondary tanks linked to three water kiosks, and a newly constructed water distribution system.
- **Increased access to sanitation facilities** through two newly constructed Bio Eco sanitation toilets and two renovated community toilets, with solar lighting for nighttime use.
- **Increased access to a clean community environment** through the implementation of a complete solid waste management system involving primary waste collection, waste removal services, recycling and composting, and the construction of a reinforced concrete bin.
- **Increased hygiene awareness and resilience** with 20 community mobilizers trained and 450 households trained on hygiene practices provided through a partnership with YMCA. These sanitation and hygiene promotion activities were implemented during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and contributed to disrupting the spread of the virus in the community.
- **Increased access to social cohesion** through the construction of a community hall, a playground for children and a soccer field.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- **The PASSA training of trainers was one of the highlights and successes of the project**. It opened the door to several opportunities in Peace Island, the urban community selected for facilitation of the methodology, which resulted in the identification and prioritization of a community action plan with specific interventions directed to improve the health and sanitation environment of the settlement.
- **The integration and coordination of the project with the local authorities was excellent**. The disaster risk reduction component of the Liberia country program contributed to the larger objectives of an improved housing ecosystem and institutional development in Greater Monrovia.
- **We need to better integrate the management** of this type of project between Habitat for Humanity International headquarters and the area office. Project budgets should reflect that.
- **A more proactive approach should be taken to support project field staff** to ensure that resources are available in a timely manner. Additional field staff should have been considered; we risked burning out our only institutional representative in Liberia.
- Also of concern is **the ongoing maintenance and monitoring of operation of the water, sanitation and hygiene systems** implemented in Peace Island. How do we make sure these systems remain sustainable in the long term?

Habitat for Humanity®

Paraguay Floods • 2019

Asunción, Paraguay

Types of intervention

Non-food items distribution

Capacity building: COVID-19 awareness raising

Project targets

- **2,925 households** (8,775 individuals) through the 2019 flood response.
- **15,000 households** through the 2020 COVID-19 response.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization**: Habitat for Humanity Paraguay.
- **Partners**: ShelterBox International, Paraguayan Red Cross.

Timeline

May 2019: Heavy rains trigger rapid flooding of the Paraguay River.

June–July 2019: Needs assessments.

July–August 2019: Training, community engagement and distributions.

March 2020: COVID-19 is declared a global pandemic.

April–May 2020: Needs assessments and planning.

July–August 2020: Project monitoring and post-distribution survey.

Summary

This project provided emergency shelter support in the form of shelter kits and household items and training to 2,925 households affected by flooding in Asunción. This was followed by a project in 2020 that provided general messaging on COVID-19 risk mitigation and specific advice on how communities could adapt their shelters to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

Background

From March to July 2019, intense rains caused rapid flooding of the Paraguay River, affecting more than 70,000 households, including 13,000 households in Asunción.

In Asunción, the areas along the river are occupied by informal settlements. An estimated 45,000 people live in flood-prone areas within the capital city. The river usually experiences a flood every 10 years, but the frequency has increased. Floods can last between two and 10 months.

These communities follow a pattern of displacement from marginal flood-prone areas to sites within the city during floods. Many households take materials from their usual shelters to their new temporary location to rebuild, and then reverse the process when return is possible.

The 2019 floods occurred with very little notice, and households had to leave homes, initially building makeshift shelters using materials such as plastic sheeting and cardboard. In Asunción, 118 planned and unplanned sites were established.

Project programming

The project aimed to augment the government response by providing shelter kits containing tarpaulins and tools, along with household items such as solar lights, mosquito nets and blankets, to displaced households to provide protection from the elements, improve privacy and security, make living conditions more dignified, and provide protection from vector-borne diseases.

The project was designed as a partnership of three organizations and was embedded within a global-level partnership agreement. Governmental support for the project was sought and given by the department responsible for disaster management.

Habitat for Humanity responded to the crisis by following our **Pathways to Permanence** approach. The program assisted refugees — mostly women, children and people over 65 — in meeting their short-, medium- and long-term housing needs to attain stability and recovery. The regional strategy was followed in all countries, with slight differences depending on the local context.

Implementation

Through needs assessments and community consultations, the contents of the shelter kits were adapted in relation to local need, cultural appropriateness, infrastructure conditions and affected population capacities. The kits were primarily based on internationally recognized standards for responses to emergency shelter needs.

The project's partners chose to directly distribute shelter materials instead of giving people cash to buy their own supplies. This decision was made to guarantee that all recipients received the help they needed equitably and efficiently, as not all the partners were well-suited to handle cash-based assistance.

To ensure a swift and efficient response, the project relied primarily on prestocked supplies in international warehouses for shelter materials, with the addition of locally sourced blankets. This approach allowed for quicker deliveries; the project received its first imported supplies within three weeks. In addition, early discussions with communities and the government revealed concerns that locally available materials wouldn't meet the required international standards.

Targeting was conducted in coordination with the national government and key sections of the municipal government in Asunción. The aim was to identify sites hosting displaced households who had received the least assistance. As the capacity of the project partners was limited, prioritization was given to sites hosting households whose status before the flood was the most marginal and who it was felt would be displaced the longest. The partners decided to take a blanket approach to distribution within identified sites, as the majority of households within these sites were in a similar position.

Throughout the project, partners engaged extensively with community groups and leaders to introduce and discuss the proposed project, understand community needs, and organize distributions and training sessions. They encouraged community members to participate in orientations, training and distributions, incorporating feedback from consultations and focus group discussions into information education communication, or IEC, materials. "Train the trainer" sessions empowered community leaders and members to continue training and supporting others. Exit surveys, feedback mechanisms and post-distribution monitoring also were conducted.

Habitat also designed bespoke messaging related to shelter and COVID-19 mitigation, with information on how previously distributed shelter materials could be used to create additional living space and divisions between living

spaces, how to improve ventilation of shelters, and how to construct an isolation space if a household member was ill and could not isolate elsewhere. Because of COVID-19 contact restrictions, messaging was distributed to households and community leaders via WhatsApp. Materials were also printed as posters and banners that were placed in communal spaces within communities.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- **More time spent in dialogue with communities on development of IEC materials** would have been beneficial. Changes were made to draft IEC materials based on engagement with communities.
- **Humanitarian actors have a role to play in drawing attention to recurring crises.** The involvement of international actors in the form of surge capacity can help raise awareness and lead to an enhanced sense of focus from national governments and agencies in situations of recurring crises — and elevate donor interest.
- **Relationships built through emergency response can lead to longer-term support.** Resources and mandate permitting, emergency response projects can lead to enhanced community dialogue and involvement in longer-term, development-focused programs.
- **In post-distribution monitoring data,** 92.5% of households reported that receiving shelter materials meant that they were able to focus on other household needs, 44.3% reported feeling less stressed, 86.7% reported feeling better protected from mosquitos, and 71% reported feeling safer after receiving the solar light. Many households reported that the items received would be valued during their period of displacement, for use when returning to their homes, and for use during future expected displacements.
- **A sense of solidarity or psychosocial support** was also anecdotally noted by community members because of the attention brought to the flooding issue through the involvement of international actors.

Habitat for Humanity®

Syrian Refugee Crisis • 2018

Southern and Eastern Amman and nearby rural areas in Jordan

Types of intervention

Community infrastructure: Water and sanitation provision

Temporary shelter support: Transitional shelters

Construction: Housing rehabilitation

Project targets

- **780 homes rehabilitated** (55% Syrian refugees, 45% Jordanians, over 10% with disabilities, 20% female-headed).
- **52 community facilities** (16 centers impacting over 21,700 individuals with disabilities, 24 additional facilities for children, and seven for women).
- **Total beneficiaries:** 120,000 people, including 14% Syrian refugees.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization**: Habitat for Humanity Jordan.
- **Partners**: Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Youth (MoY), Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA), Greater Amman Municipality (GAM).

Timeline

2018: Start implementing the project in south Amman.

2020: Project area moves to east Amman to serve refugees and the host community. Transition from owner-driven to contracting approach.

2021: External funding secured for sustainable green interventions.

2022: The MERCI program supports over 800 families by rehabilitating homes and improving 42 communal facilities.

2023: Project area expands to a Palestinian refugee camp.

Summary

Since 2018, the MERCI, or Middle East Response for Crises Initiative, program has rehabilitated over 780 homes and 52 public spaces in Amman, Jordan. Beginning in West Amman with a homeowner-driven approach, the project expanded south and east of the city to serve Syrian refugee households and moved into contracting. Continued funding allowed for growth and adoption of sustainable green practices. Overall, the intervention demonstrated adaptability, innovation and commitment to improving the living conditions of hundreds of vulnerable communities and households over the years.

Background

Jordan, burdened by a population that reached 11 million, one-third of whom are refugees seeking sanctuary from distant conflicts, grappled with immense pressure on its vital resources. The housing crisis painted a stark picture: Nearly 1.4 million Jordanians and refugees yearned for the security and dignity of affordable, decent housing, yet were forced to settle for substandard dwellings that compromised their safety and health. This struggle unfolded against a backdrop of alarming water scarcity; Jordan, ranked third globally in this crisis, teetered on the precipice of "absolute water shortage" by 2025, further jeopardizing living conditions. Compounding these challenges, Jordan's energy vulnerability stemmed from its reliance on imports for a staggering 96% of its fuel, a situation that had steadily worsened over the past two decades.

Project programming

The program addressed critical shelter needs and fostered a more inclusive and thriving community environment for vulnerable Jordanians and refugees from Syria. At the household level, this initiative focused on:

- **Reducing urgent shelter needs:** Socioeconomic and technical assessments identified families living in substandard houses or other dwellings, prioritizing their critical needs.
- **Enhancing stability:** Substandard homes received upgrades to meet minimum humanitarian standards, while nonresidential buildings were weatherproofed to improve their functionality.
- **Promoting security of tenure:** Rental agreements were facilitated to guarantee residents' peace of mind and stability in their housing.
- **Maintaining quality and engagement:** The program supervised construction and conducted regular site visits, ensuring proper implementation and adherence to standards.
- **Raising awareness:** Residents were educated on responsible disposal of non-reusable materials, promoting environmental consciousness.

At the community level, it sought to:

- **Upgrade public spaces:** Technical assessments identified public spaces in need of improvement, focusing on safety, accessibility and sanitation.
- **Foster collaboration and sustainability:** Partners were engaged through agreements and involved in long-term sustainability planning for the improved spaces.
- **Ensure quality and accountability:** Project supervisors conducted regular site visits, and final inspections ensured compliance and facilitated disbursement of payments.

By addressing both individual and community needs, this program aimed to create a more stable and dignified living environment for vulnerable populations in Jordan.

Implementation

Habitat for Humanity Jordan operated under the approval of relevant government agencies for each project. The projects followed two main pillars:

Household level

- Inter-agency coordination through the national Shelter Cluster ensured collaboration and prevented duplication of efforts.
- Vulnerable Syrian and Jordanian families directly applied for assistance or were referred by humanitarian organizations.
- Assessments determined households' needs and eligibility, including vulnerability, socioeconomic status, and the technical feasibility of home rehabilitation.
- Standardized shelter works were meticulously planned through bills of quantities and scopes of work.

- Beneficiary agreements, tendering processes, tenure security measures, quality assurance practices and post-completion assessments ensured a smooth process. A contractor-led approach was taken to avoid construction price fluctuations throughout the project's lifespan and to reduce monitoring visits to households during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Community level

- Habitat Jordan conducted consultations and focus groups in disadvantaged areas to identify priority upgrades for facilities such as schools, medical centers, community halls and WASH services.
- Partnerships with government bodies, community-based organizations, contractors and other entities addressed post-Syrian crisis demands, facilitated communication, and guaranteed the sustainability of public spaces.
- Technical assessments, partnership agreements, tendering processes, implementation supervision and handovers were conducted to guarantee project sustainability.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- The program successfully integrated housing with **green intervention techniques**.
- Successes and challenges were identified through **monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, or MEAL, measurements and analysis**, leading to actionable recommendations.
- Achieving consistent **adherence to standards and specifications** throughout construction required ongoing effort.
- Tailoring the rehabilitation approach by **shifting from an owner-driven to a contractor approach** led to better quality and higher satisfaction.
- Successfully **expanding into new areas** like the Marka district and Palestinian camps highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and community engagement.
- **Incorporating green components** into projects not only contributed to environmental sustainability but also fostered community ownership and pride.
- **Diversifying funding sources** strengthened resources and program impact, requiring strong donor relationships and clear project demonstrations for successful funding opportunities.
- Collaborating with diverse **stakeholders and partners**, including government agencies, NGOs and community leaders, enriched project outcomes and fostered a sense of ownership.
- **Cash assistance** could be a relevant intervention methodology to support shelter activities. Families would have flexibility in deciding where to invest the grant, rather than a normal physical intervention.

Habitat for Humanity®

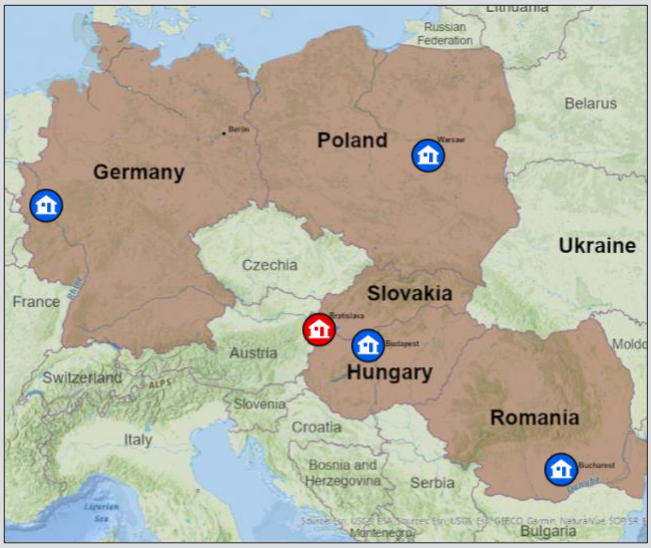
Ukraine Refugee Influx • 2022

Poland, Romania, Hungary, Germany, Slovakia

Types of intervention

Construction: Repurposing buildings

Temporary shelter support: Rental housing and host families



Project targets (24 months after the beginning of the crisis)

- **3,300 emergency travel kits** distributed.
- **10,000 refugees** benefiting from services at the Ukraine border.
- **17,000 refugees** receiving household items.
- **8,000 refugees** served with short-term accommodations.
- **2,500 people served** with mid- or long-term accommodations.
- **2700 refugees** benefiting from refurbished spaces.

Stakeholders

Implementing organizations: Habitat for Humanity Poland, Habitat for Humanity Romania, Habitat for Humanity Hungary, Habitat for Humanity Germany, Habitat for Humanity International Europe and Middle East Area Office.

- **Partners:** Several municipalities and local and international organizations partnered with the Habitat network.

Timeline

February 2022: The invasion of Ukraine causes a refugee crisis.

March 2022: Habitat Europe and Middle East starts coordinating global efforts to support national organizations responding to the crisis.

July 2022: A dedicated regional response coordination team was fully functional.

August 2023: Work continues autonomously in each country, adapting to local needs.

Summary

Since the war in Ukraine escalated in February 2022, Habitat for Humanity has been actively supporting refugees in Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Germany. The immediate relief consisted of emergency travel kits and temporary accommodation. To help address the mid-term housing needs of refugees, Habitat upgraded collective shelters and provided 12-month rental assistance. For the long term, Habitat scaled up existing innovative pilots, namely social rental and vacant building renovation. Habitat has also advocated for expanding social housing initiatives to ensure that refugees and vulnerable communities have access to safe, dignified and affordable housing.

From the outset, Habitat jumped into action by providing essential assistance to refugees with the aim of helping them find a safe place to stay, either in the short or medium term. This was achieved by fixing up and furnishing collective shelters, supporting host families, facilitating affordable rental housing programs, and reusing empty buildings for housing.

Background

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia caused a massive refugee crisis, with millions of people, primarily women and children, fleeing their homes to neighboring European countries for safety. As of June 2022, the number of refugees who had fled to neighboring countries had exceeded 6.8 million.

Governments, the public and civil society came together to support the refugees during the initial weeks of the invasion. But this mass displacement had a profound impact, as it quickly overwhelmed other countries' capacity to absorb the refugees. It's worth noting that these countries were facing a significant shortage of affordable housing even before the conflict.

Poland faced the highest influx of refugees, with over 17 million border crossings from Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion. As of the end of December 2023, almost 1 million individuals from Ukraine were either officially registered or recognized as refugees or asylum-seekers in Poland.

The Habitat for Humanity network had a 30-year history of supporting local communities in the region. While some national organizations, like Habitat Romania, had developed robust disaster risk reduction and response capabilities, others were small and focused on advocacy and small demonstration projects.

Project programming

Habitat for Humanity responded to the crisis by following our **Pathways to Permanence** approach. The program assisted refugees — mostly women, children and people over 65 — in meeting their short-, medium- and long-term housing needs to attain stability and recovery. The regional strategy was followed in all countries, with slight differences depending on the local context.

- **Short-term — emergency accommodation:** Initial support was provided when people were on the move (leaving Ukraine through the neighboring countries) where Habitat had a presence, staying temporarily in different cities and provinces. Collective shelters were refurbished and outfitted with furniture and appliances, while individuals were provided non-food items for travel and vouchers. Host families and even hostel night support were also available.
- **Medium-term — interim shelter solutions:** The Habitat network launched an appeal in several cities, requesting that owners of empty homes offer them to Habitat for free. Habitat would then manage the housing of refugee families for six to 12 months, which could include repairs and furnishing. In Poland, Habitat opened its existing social rental program for people fleeing Ukraine, providing rental subsidies, refurbishment and equipment. In Romania, Habitat launched a similar social rental program for two years and refurbished empty spaces into collective shelters and social services Hubs.
- **Long-term — housing solutions:** Habitat's long-term focus is on supporting access to affordable rental housing and increasing the housing stock available for direct management by Habitat, including vacant apartments and reused empty buildings. Households also received non-housing support services, such as language classes, child care support and vocational training. Habitat advocated for legislative changes to clear the way for housing solutions and shared knowledge and technical support with national governments and municipalities.

Implementation

Habitat teams in Poland, Romania, Hungary, Germany and Slovakia have been actively serving displaced people from Ukraine since the war escalated in March 2022.

Emergency accommodation

In this phase, the response in each country was more diverse, according to pre-crisis disaster risk reduction and response capacities (some organizations were only doing advocacy or fundraising work before the crisis):

- **Habitat Poland** partnered with the Warsaw city council to operate a welcome kiosk at a train station to help people find temporary lodging. They arranged matches with host families and offered hostel nights. Habitat Poland provided short-term accommodation for almost 5,600 people. It also used the Habitat ReStore as a logistics center for furniture donations. In addition to offering material support to improve the living conditions of collective shelters in Warsaw, Habitat Poland set up a line to provide information about accommodation to more than 5,180 individuals.
- **Habitat Romania** staff members were present at the most transited border points, in Siret and Isaccea, and in Bucharest at the North Railway Station, where refugees received information and answers to their questions. Habitat Romania donated electric heating devices to warm up emergency tents, along with giving backpacks with external batteries to refugees crossing into the country. Beyond meeting immediate needs, Habitat helped over 2,700 refugees with secure hotel accommodations in Bucharest, the biggest transit point in Romania.
- **Habitat Hungary** channeled financial support and in-kind donations to border locations and district institutions supporting refugees. Financial aid included programs for solidarity accommodation, rental assistance, renovations and refugee family integration initiatives such as language courses. In-kind donations primarily consisted of essential household items such as furniture, kitchenware, hygiene kits and other equipment.
- **In Slovakia**, there is no national Habitat organization, but Habitat for Humanity International's Europe and Middle East Area Office is based in the capital city. In the first few weeks of the crisis, some of its staff worked as volunteers at the border and other places to support civil society response. The organization provided hygiene and sanitation products to newly arrived refugees. In addition, Habitat Europe and Middle East distributed household electrical appliances to individual and collective shelters and other organizations. After a few months, it hired someone to coordinate its response and foster partnerships with like-minded organizations in Slovakia.

Interim shelter solutions

This phase lasts six to 12 months.

- **Habitat Poland** provided continuous support to refugee households through midterm rental assistance, reaching over 1,090 individuals. Under the social rental program, Habitat Poland provided partial monthly rental subsidies to beneficiary households, who gradually increased their participation in the rental costs as they moved toward self-reliance. Habitat Poland provided full rental cost coverage to households who required more assistance because of their specific needs and socioeconomic situations. Habitat also introduced the "Step into Your Home" program, which helped refugee households secure midterm lease agreements with landlords and served 184 people. Participants either independently selected landlords or received assistance from rental agency services. Habitat Poland also converted unused office space into interim accommodation solutions. The organization has been co-leading the national Shelter Working Group with UNHCR (currently Shelter/Housing/Accommodation Sector with the International Organization for Migration within the Refugee Response Coordination) to promote information sharing, collaboration and coordination.
- **Habitat Hungary** launched solidarity accommodation and rental support programs with a local partner in Budapest, placing over 500 families in no-cost or low-cost midterm housing. The organization sought homeowners who would offer a vacant room or apartment for refugees who wanted to stay in Budapest or the surrounding area for the short to medium term. Habitat acted as a mediator between landlords and tenants.
- **Habitat Romania** refurbished the common areas in collective shelters and social services hubs for refugees who were on the move or seeking stable shelter. It also rented 30 apartments and covered all rent and utility costs for 109 refugees who were looking for a place to stay for more than four weeks. Partners also provided medium-term accommodation in two locations for more than 120 refugees for two months.

Housing solutions

Habitat advocated for sustainable, long-term, affordable housing options.

- **Habitat Poland** adapted previously tested solutions to support housing for Ukrainian refugees. It pioneered a program that the government later adopted under the name Social Rental Agency. Habitat Poland acted as mediator, subrenting apartments to tenants at a lowered rent with a 12-month housing agreement. Habitat Poland also cooperated with the local authorities to renovate empty spaces for affordable housing. Within a year of the crisis, the organization had employed over 70 people and increased its program by 400% to address the refugee housing crisis. It also scaled up a program to renovate empty spaces such as unused apartments and vacant offices. The government showed interest in this model, paving the way for broader adoption. Habitat became a member of the expert committee advising the Polish government on supporting vulnerable groups, including refugees.
- **Habitat Romania** offers a long-term social rental program similar to the one in Poland. Since the program began in June 2022 with a capacity of 35 apartments, it has helped over 220 refugees, 55% of whom are now fully integrated in Romania. In early 2023, Habitat Romania began assisting in negotiations with landlords and helping refugees understand the country's new legislative measures and how they can receive government subsidies. Habitat Romania also rehabilitated an office building in Bucharest to house 100 people on a temporary or long-term basis.
- **Habitat Germany** established an affordable housing program to find apartments suitable for refugee households; persuade owners to rent to refugees; and support refugees in reviewing rental contracts, understanding their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and securing state subsidies for paying rent. At the time of publication, the project is being implemented locally in five cities near Cologne. By the end of 2022, 114 apartments had been rented to refugee families — 363 individuals in all. Habitat Germany also created housing specifically for unaccompanied young adults from Ukraine. The Heimstatt Nikolaus-Groß-Haus in Cologne and the Lebensgemeinschaft Jugend in Kürten have both housed disadvantaged young people for decades. After the influx of refugees, they partnered with Habitat to expand their facilities, offering young people safe places to live independently.
- **Habitat Hungary** helped refugee families find mid-term and long-term rental agreements with local landlords, offered furniture and appliances, and assigned social workers to aid them with daily tasks. In the first phase, Habitat and its partners created a database listing free homes and apartments and connected families with people who could help them obtain these accommodations. At the time of publication, the From Streets to Homes! Association, which partnered with Habitat Hungary's solidarity accommodation and rental support program until March 2023, has continued to help families find free accommodation. Since March 2023, Habitat Hungary has been supporting refugee families mostly with in-kind donations. The national organization also completed several collective shelter renovations through partner organizations, building, for example, a kitchen for the resident families or renovating a barrier-free building that refugee family members with disabilities are able to use for everyday tasks such as cooking, doing laundry or completing homework assignments after school.

The intervention had a dedicated regional coordination team until mid-2023. After that, each national organization continued to work with a common strategy but greater autonomy as the coordination team focused its efforts in Ukraine.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- Habitat for Humanity's **existing programs and experience in the region allowed national organizations to quickly adapt their work to the crisis**. They leveraged this expertise to expand their affordable housing programs, influence housing policies, and ultimately strengthen their organizations.
- To ensure refugees can acclimate and receive necessary assistance in the future, Habitat national organizations have engaged in **advocacy**, mediating on behalf of renters, speaking to governments and nonprofits about refugee housing needs, and influencing policies.
- **While housing remains a priority for refugees, finding quality of life again in their new homes is also important.** Together with local nonprofits and aid organizations, Habitat has been able to help refugee families regain some sense of normalcy by assisting them as they enroll children in school, make doctor's appointments, enter the job market and build a sense of community. Psychological support has also been essential, as many refugees have suffered greatly from the trauma of the war and subsequent displacement.

Habitat for Humanity®

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24-89933/PDF/GTM/10-2024/KP